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UNANIMISM

A Study of

CONVERSION AND SOME CONTEMPORARY FRENCH POETS

Being a Paper read before

"The Heretics"

on November 25, 1912

BY

JANE ELLEN HARRISON, LL.D., D.LITT.,

STAFF-LECTURER AND SOME-TIME FELLOW OF
NEWNHAM COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

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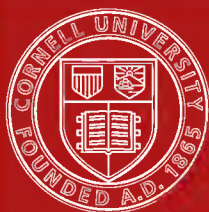
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UNANIMISM AND CONVERSION.

The subject of my paper to-night is "Conversion and some Contemporary French poets."

We do not usually associate Conversion—the change of heart, the New Birth, with French poetry, and I have had a lurking fear that you might think I was employing a sort of catch-penny title, meant to attract a reluctant audience. This is not so; the connection between Conversion and certain recent French poetry is real and vital. In any case the form of my title was finally fixed by our President, not by me. I had boldly offered to him a paper on "Conversion and Unanimism." He felt, I am sure rightly, that even for an assembly of Heretics such a title was at once too obscure, depressing and even repellant, so he suggested by way of enlivenment and elucidation the addition of "Contemporary French poets." Knowing him to be a wise man with a sensitive hand always on the public pulse I bowed to his decision; bowed publicly, so to speak, but secretly I decided to speak mainly about Unanimism all the same.

You will hear then to-night a good deal about Unanimism, ancient and modern, its meaning, its theory and above all its relation to Conversion.

You will hear a little, only a little, about the actual French poetry that is its expression, and with this I will begin.

Who are the Unanimists ?

A little band of young French poets, all of this century, none of them I think much over twenty-five, who dreamed a dream, and who founded l'Abbaye,* a monastery without an Abbot, but with a printing press, a monastery in which dwelt not only men like-minded but also women and children.

Le rêve l'Abbaye—ah ! sans Abbé.

—a monastery where artists, artizans, dreamers, poor but gay at heart, might live together *doux comme des fleurs*. How young it all sounds ! They lived together for fourteen months. Cold and want, yes positive hunger, through a terrible winter, broke and scattered them. No one had any money, the printing press did not pay, l'Abbaye became a dream once more, but a dream that lived and worked.

The founders of l'Abbaye did not call themselves Unanimists ; they did not call themselves anything. But, in 1908, the Abbaye Press published *La Vie Unanime* by M. Jules Romains

* The story of l'Abbaye is briefly told by Mr. Flint in the Poetry Review for August, 1912. To Mr. Flint's article I owe my first knowledge of the Unanimists. I am also deeply indebted to the sympathetic study of Unanimism in the *Propos Critiques* of M. Duliame! to which my attention was drawn by the kindness of M. Georges Roth of Gonville and Caius College.

and this gave rise to the catch-word *Ecole Unanimiste*. Its meaning is clear enough. Unanimism is oneness in spirit. "The Unity of the Spirit is the bond of peace." We have of late become shy of talking of spirit, we are afraid of the dualism of body and spirit, so, if we prefer to define Unanimism in more modern terms, we may say that it means "Life is one," "Life unites." The watch-words of the school are Union, Affirmation of Sympathy, Inclusion. Like all living movements Unanimism is positive, it affirms rather than denies.

For myself, I prefer to keep the words body and spirit, for, though their usage may be old-fashioned, between body and spirit there is a real distinction though not a separation. The body is the means, the vehicle of seclusion, of individuality. Each body is a shutting off, a circling round a separate ego; even the most spiritual part of our body, the brain, is an instrument, we are now-a-days taught, of exclusion.

Science has shown us to some extent what is meant by individuality and we are not as individual as we used to think. The rudest mental shock I ever received in my life was when I first read Mr. William James's *Psychology*. I had felt so sure of the solid existence of one thing at least, of myself, and suddenly I seemed to go to pieces, to lapse into a stream of consciousness an ill-defined compound, or tendency, partly myself, partly other people.

I have just been reading another book, Mr. Julian Huxley's delightful "The Individual in

the Animal Kingdom," a book I would implore everyone to read at once. You see there, as in a picture, how the whole of animal life sets towards the making of the individual and yet how the individual never is, never can be, complete. Completion would spell death.

The body then makes for severance. To take a simple instance. I can only speak for myself, but as a matter of experience if I find myself actively disliking a person, really shrinking from him, getting out of the room if he or she come in, I always find this antipathy, this repugnance is of the body. It is some little physical thing, some trick or habit, something perhaps mainly nervous that is intolerable. I have never felt the same almost uncontrollable shrinking from anyone's spirit, for example, as expressed in a book. Indeed it has happened to me to tolerate and even be attracted by a book and to be instantly repelled by the author.

So I like to think of *Unanimism* as being what its name says, the Unity of the Spirit.

One element of Unanimist theory should endear the school at once to the heart of every sound Heretic, and that is their protest against the undue sway of the traditional. The *Abbaye* boasts that it is

" pas pour un d'Académiés."

We as Heretics should, I think, expend our sympathies, not mainly on orthodoxies which stand stiff and secure in their own traditional

buckram, but on young movements, like Unanimism, just trembling into life.

The Unanimists do not, like the Futurists, demand that we should make a bonfire of the past, and above all of our Museums, but they do say that in poetry and indeed in all art *il faut des barbares, des fauves*, and by barbarians they mean poets who sing of their own personal thoughts and emotion, express—if you like it—their own reactions, not those reactions handed down to us by others and labelled canonical and respectable. The spirit, says M. Romain, has many ways of getting possessed of truth. The man of science gets hold of things from the outside, regarding them with respect to their measure and their quantity. The poet, the musician and the god, instead of measuring the surface and the weight of things like the man of science, possesses them without convention or caprice, “as a man possesses his hate or his hope”—*comme un homme possède sa haine ou son espoir*. The Unanimists affirm rather than criticise or deny. Yet historically one sees clearly enough that they stand for a reaction against the lyrical egotism in art and literature of the close of the last century. In the eighties and nineties, through which I had the misfortune to live, *the* great artistic crime was to be *bourgeois*, to consider the bourgeois, to be understood by him, to be popular. The divorce between Art and the community was well-nigh complete, poets and artists formed little esoteric groups eccentric in mind, manner,

vocabulary, even clothes. Their method was that of *megalomania*, the enhancement of individuality by exclusion, seclusion by concentration on the ego. The Unanimist reaction is complete. It is for the people their poets would sing, and never again of themselves. "I would write," one of them says, "not that you may know me, but that you may know yourself."

The poet's object is so to write that each man should learn to love his own life, penetrate it, and see its beauty and value, "*faire que chacun aime sa vie la pénétre.*" The Unanimists renounce academic rhyme and rhythm, they renounce Academic seclusion. The focus of interest is all shifted from the ego, from the inside to the outside ; therein is their salvation.

What is the Unanimist Creed ? It is best given in Christian words. "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst." One trembles, however, to find a creed so large and invigorating about to crystallize into something very like dogma. This dogmatic aspect, which is of course the only form sufficiently definite for analysis, is best seen in two poets, M. Arcos and M. Romain.

Life is one—but you may think of that oneness in two ways. There is the stream of life in *time*, or rather in what Professor Bergson calls *durée*; that is one. Each of us is a snowball growing bigger every moment, and in which all *our* past, and also the past out of which we sprang, all the

generations behind us, is rolled up, involved. Or we may think of the oneness in another way, so to speak laterally or spatially, contemporaneously. All the life existing at one moment in the world, and at every successive moment, though individualized, is one. We are all of us members one of another. That is M. Romain's doctrine. So far as he has a philosophy, and he is very much a philosopher, M. Romain's is based on Professor Durkheim, M. Arcos' on Professor Bergson.

If you will pardon a personal confession, I may say that my own interest in this school was caused in a sense by this conjunction. For the last five years my outlook and my specialist work have been profoundly altered by the writings of these two philosophers, who seem so alien. They had given me new life. It was an amazement and a delight to me to find suddenly that in France and for a school of very young thinkers the same two angels had stepped down and troubled the stagnant waters. I felt a burst of sympathetic Unanimism.

M. René Arcos is the author of a poem called "What is being born"—*Ce qui naît*. What is being born, what is even now coming to the birth is—God.

There is someone in me who is stronger than me.
There is someone in me more true than me.
Each man makes God a little—with his life.

It is not long since Mr. Bernard Shaw was here scandalizing some of us by telling us it was our business not to worship but to make—God. M.

Arcos puts it more vividly and perhaps more reverently ; we are part of the whole stream of creation that groans and travails into consciousness for his birth. The individual life in this great panorama counts but as a momentary vision. A sentence in Mr. Wells' recent book, *Marriage* (p. 498), reads like an echo of *Ce qui nait*. " This is as much as I see in time and space as I know it, *something struggling to exist*. It's true to the end of any limits. Above the heart in me is that : the desire to know better, to know beautifully and to transmit my knowledge. That's all there is in life beyond food and shelter and tidying up. This Being, opening its eyes, trying to comprehend, nothing else matters."

M. Arcos piles on metaphor after metaphor to show us as in a picture *l'Evolution Creatrice*. In the great masqued dance of the ages the individual " accepts the immense incognito imposed by the divine law." He is but one sheaf in the vast harvest. Behind me, he says, I hear Time, with his scythe mowing down life. Each moment of my life is a ripe ear fallen. And once in a ghastly vision he sees Time, *Durée*, as an army of galloping horses ; the riders are carried along stiff and senseless, but galvanized by the impulse, the electric shock, of contact with *durée* into momentary, individual life. The simile is Professor Bergson's and without some knowledge of Professor Bergson's philosophy most of M. Arcos' poem would be hard to follow. It is impossible to summarize, for it is just a

cauldron teeming with imagery in which phantom after phantom rises up to tell the same tale, the birth of the God in duration.

M. Romain's work, though even more patently based on that of a philosopher, is quite other. His mind is, I think, deeply impressed not only with the tenets but with the temperament of that philosopher, who is of course Professor Durkheim. His method is marked by the same qualities. Strength, iteration, tenacious dogmatism, a certain hardness, a rather gimleting habit of mind.

Prof. Durkheim's doctrine is familiar by now to most of us. If not familiar you will find it very persuasively stated by Mr. Cornford in his "From Religion to Philosophy." In brief it is this. Religion is not the aspiration of the individual soul after a god, or after the unknown, or after the infinite; rather it is the expression, utterance, projection of the emotion, the desire of a group. Now historically this is true of the genesis of religion. That I hold is established. Religion, in its rise, is indistinguishable from social custom, embodying social emotion. The most primitive religion we know, which we scarcely venture to call religion, is Totemism. Totemism is of the group—totem itself means "group." Totemism, Prof. Durkheim has shown, is the expression of group emotion rallying round a symbol of unity. The most primitive of rites is the collective choral totemistic dance.

The only debatable question to my mind is—does religion remain to the end what it was at the outset—social ethics of groups? M. Romaine thinks it does. Boldly he waves aside the whole of orthodox theology, and substitutes the group-god. The real things of to-day, he says, “Are born when there are many men. They are breathed forth exhaled from multitudes.” The real forces of to-day—half-god, half-devil—are these group forces. These, and these only, M. Romaine says, are gods—things super- or rather *infra*-human.

Further, he establishes a hierarchy which seems at first in its formulation a trifle grotesque, but which yet is profoundly actual and suggestive.

First there is the god or force *of the group two*, known to all, common to man with the rest of animal and even plant life. This god of the group two is a rudimentary creature, violent and, till blended with other and more distinctively humane forces, always transitory. From the outset, as Prof. Bergson has shown, this god, the vehicle of the race-life, is the sworn foe of the individual. This poor god of the group two has fallen lately on somewhat evil days. He used to dominate romance and even morality; all was fair in love and in war. Now in literature he is almost taboo. His manifestations are felt to be too uniform, monotonous, predictable, to be adequate material for either creation, artist or spectator.

Next comes the god or force *of the family*, a god violently dominant up to quite recent days,

demanding and receiving holocausts of human and especially feminine lives, a god sometimes a tower of strength and joy, but often also a terror and a paralysis. Then comes *the god-village*, peaceful, somnolent, slack; then *the god-town*. One must have lived long in a metropolis to know his haunting, complex potency. I can remember the time when life lived outside of London seemed to me scarcely life at all. Last, there is that terrible irresponsible monster, *the god-crowd*. Through him we realise what indeed is evident enough throughout, that to M. Romains a god is often, perhaps usually, half-devil.

To resume his doctrine. Any association of men begets a force, which is not the sum of the forces of its individual members; and this new force, this group-begotten potency, is more real, more living than any orthodox divinity. Moreover, each group-god is necessarily a Unanimistic force. For better for worse it unites, not divides.

We may further note that in a sense the small group is always the enemy, or at least the rival, of the larger group.* The family group is often, odd though it may seem, the foe of the group two, the town of the family. We see this principle working at Cambridge in academic life. The small group, the college, with its circumscribed

* The remedy is, of course, the co-ordination of the rival groups into a more completely organized society. For this topic, which is a little outside my present interest, see Mr. McDougall's chapter on "Social Psychology" in his manual on *Psychology* in the Home University Library.

life, and closer and intenser reactions, is always more or less at issue with the larger group, the University. There is, I may remark in passing, no better place for the study of group-divinities than a smallish college.

Personally, I would rather not call these undeniable group-forces *gods*. The word, I think, having other and very strong associations, makes for obscurantism. I am content that these various human associations, from the rudimentary group of two up to the complex city-group, should be recognised as definite forces which it is our business to realise and understand and control, in order that they may be utilised and enjoyed. They are now intense realities, and in the past they have been undoubtedly the source of many theologies. What is Eros but the mystical force of the group two, in love and friendship? What is Bacchus but the collective strength and joy of the group of young initiated men, the Bacchoi.

The Greek word for god, *deos*, was, as Prof. Murray* has pointed out, not so stiff and personal and human-shaped, as our word god. The fact of success is, Æschylus says, a god; and Sophocles, in the Oedipus Tyrannus, says splendidly that in the unwritten law of the human conscience. "A great god liveth and groweth not old." "To recognise a friend after long absence," Euripides says, "is a god." While Pliny, most magnificently of all, says "God is the helping of man by man,"

* *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, 1912, p. 139.

deus est mortale juvare mortalem. Pliny probably borrowed his saying from Poseidonios, and the Unanimists might well take it from Pliny as their motto.

M. Arcos then, we have seen, stands for the unity of life in time, along the generations, for *durée*, the thing that is coming to the birth, the god that is being born. M. Romain is more of space than time, he is of contemporaneous unity. Also he is much less cosmic. The whole creation with him does not groan and travail. It is humanity with which he is concerned and, almost wholly, with the grouping of humanity. His Unanimism, being of man only, has a certain aridity, like the classical humanism of the Greeks. We miss the birds, and the beasts, and the flowers, the great god Pan.

Of the third Unanimist I find it difficult to speak. First, because we have some of us lately seen him in the flesh, and one hesitates to dissect a live personality. Next he is more of a poet, less of a philosopher, than the other two, and his verse has a peculiar simplicity and poignancy that makes analysis almost impertinent.

The book by which M. Vildrac is best known, and which is indeed his confession of faith as a Unanimist, and therefore open to analysis, is his "Book of Love," *Livre d'Amour*. A few months ago a friend asked me if I had heard of the new French poet, Vildrac, and urged me to read him, offering at the same time to lend me the *Livre d'Amour*. I answered, "Oh, please don't. I am

sick of the very title." Anyone who has been brought up on Ovid naturally loathes the word *Amour*. But my friend persisted, and, trusting to his taste, I took the book, opened it, and was instantly spell-bound.

This *Amour* is not the *God-of-the-group-two*. That in itself was a relief. Still less was it Love in the abstract, Love of the Absolute. I think it was Dr. MacTaggart who truly said that "As for loving the Absolute, you might as well try to fall in love with the General Post Office." This *Livre d'Amour* is of the love of Everyman, but so little abstract, so direct, so personal as almost sometimes to be unbearable.

Above all things M. Vildrac's poetry is sincere, alive, first-hand. It has on it that nameless bloom of the thing felt, the thing said for the first time. It has not yet crystallized into theory. Someone has remarked somewhere that Poetry does not *advocate* a new world, it *creates* one, and—strangest thing of all—the greatest art, while it creates a new world, alters the old one only a very little. I don't understand this, but I am sure it is what the Post-Impressionists forget. Now M. Vildrac's new world of love is the old thrice-familiar world, only . . . only . . . reborn by a touch.

You will certainly be told that Vildrac is like Walt Whitman. So he is in a sense. He writes *vers libres* and his creed is much the same. The Unanimists have indeed rechristened themselves Whitmanists. They have, moreover, one important

characteristic in common. Though they are Christian in their avowal of a universal love, their Christianity is wholly untouched by asceticism. Read for example that moving poem *L'Auberge* where salvation is wrought by a love that is half pity, the love of spring for autumn. Vildrac, like S. Peter, like Walt Whitman, has seen a sheet let down from heaven and heard a voice saying, "Call thou nothing common nor unclean." In this they are like, but oh the difference! Where Walt Whitman wallows interminably in front of you till you do not know where to look, Vildrac just touches you, touches you to the quick and is gone. It may be in part because his medium is the clean sharp cut French tongue. I am not sure.

And the difference between Vildrac and S. Paul! S. Paul even after his conversion seems still to "breathe out threatenings." He is dominant, insistent, self-important; we feel him the arch-egotist. Vildrac is gentle, shy of his personality and yours, almost to wildness, he shrinks away lest even that gentlest love he has to offer should intrude and so hurt you.

His poems as a rule scarcely bear summarising, but take the verses called "Commentary"—a confession of experience. A poet sits down to make a poem. He has done it so often before, but he must tread the beaten road again. Pen and paper are before him, but to-day he cannot begin; he feels he is stifled—pent in. He had been about to tell the old story, to set *himself* once more on the stage of his poem, the same old

dusty self, with its stale sentiments and emotions and passions, only tricked out, costumed anew, masquerading as some one else. Suddenly he knows the figure to be tawdry, shameful. He is hot all over when he looks at it. He must get out into the air, away from himself; out of the stuffy museum where for so long he has stirred the dead egotist ashes, out into the street the bigger life of his fellow men. He must live with them, for them, through them.

I quote a translation by a poet—himself, I think, unconsciously a Unanimist:—

I am weary of deeds done inside myself,
I am weary of voyages inside myself,
And of heroism wrought by strokes of the pen,
And of a beauty made up of formulæ.

I am ashamed of lying to my work,
Of my work lying to my life,
And of being able to content myself
(By burning sweet spices)
With the mouldering smell that is master here.

(*Livre d'Amour*, p. 17.)

And the poet goes out, meeting this man and that, learning to know them and to love them, showing them the bigness, the beauty of their lives, and . . . he never comes back.

We have had before us three different exponents of Unanimism. M. Arcos showed us the stream of life in ceaseless change, yet

uninterrupted unity ; M. Romain the oneness of life lived together in groups, its strength and dominance. M. Vildrac has shown us the value of each individual manifestation of life, and the strange new joy and even ecstasy that comes of human sympathy.

Such, in brief, is Unanimism, and at this point you may well ask, what in the name of reason has this unity of spiritual life, this Unanimism, to do with the old religious doctrine and experience of Conversion ?

Everything, I believe, and hope to show.

I perhaps ought to confess how, as a matter of fact, it dawned on me that there was any connection. I was reading M. Vildrac's *Livre d'Amour* when suddenly I felt a hot wave of conviction—this man has been converted ; here was the old, old story of a change of heart, sudden and complete. So I set to work to see what lay behind it.

What then is Conversion ? What, if any reality, does it represent ?

The very word conversion has a strange old-world superstitious sound in our ears to-day. Probably I am the only person left in this room who was brought up in the old evangelical doctrine—" *Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" I hope and trust that no young child's life is embittered nowadays by being told that he must "flee from the wrath to come,"

that he must "look not behind him," that the "old Adam in him must die," that he must "lay hold on salvation and the cross of Christ," and that if he neglect so great salvation he will go "into outer darkness, where shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth"—"where there worm dieth not."

It was a grim and awful thing to tell a child. It only shows what a tough thing a healthy child's mind is that any of us emerged into even tolerable sanity, though we carry, I think, always the scars, in a certain ferocity of mind, a certain intolerance in conviction.

Now of course there came a reaction, and of course, as usual, it went too far; we emptied out the child with the bath-water. It is that child I want to save and bring back to-night—the kernel of truth in the doctrine of conversion. A doctrine like that, so terrible, so soul-searching, is not a mere phantom of the sick mind. It represents, in however exasperated and monstrous form, a real experience—a real living, possible emotion, that any of us may any time go through. What is the experience; what are the facts?

Fortunately sufficient facts have been now collected to allow of something like a generalisation. They are easily accessible in two books. Mr. William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and Mr. Davenport's *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals*. William James's book is probably familiar to you all. Mr. Davenport's book is much less brilliant and fascinating, but a very useful supplement, because less sympathetic;

it is the work of a man by nature rather rationalist than mystic. Also, in Mr. James's book we get the higher forms of *mystical experience*: in Mr. Davenport's the cruder revivalist forms of conversion largely dependent on crowd psychology and herd suggestion.

From these two books certain facts clearly emerge.

(1) What we call conversion is only the sudden, crude and rather violent form of what is known as the mystical state.

(2) The phenomena of the mystical state can be noted and examined quite apart from the intellectual account given of them by the patient, the mystic, a converted man himself.

What I mean is this, the patient explains his experience in terms of whatever theology he has been brought up in. Generally he explains this experience as a revelation of, through union with, a god. If he has been brought up in the religion of Isis he announces that he has been made one with Isis, and seen her face to face. If he is a worshipper of Bacchus, he announces that he *is* a Bacchus, he is one with the god. If it is S. Ignatius he is "rapt into the knowledge and deep mystery of the Holy Trinity." If it is S. Theresa she swoons into ecstasy as the Bride of Christ.

I propose, therefore, to neglect all these after-the-event explanations, that is, all the theology, and to examine only the actual psychological experience. I am aware that in so doing I may part

company with some and possibly most of my audience ; they will think I am begging the whole question. I can only ask them to bear with me and to realise that I am not now saying that a God does not exist who may be the object or the agent of conversion ; far from it. All I say now is that I am examining phenomena which do not necessarily carry with them the hypothesis of any god's existence.

My own position is substantially that which I set forth some ten years ago in a paper read to some of my audience before we became Heretics. It was modestly entitled *Alpha and Omega*, and claimed that we could, and indeed almost must, drop theology if we would keep religion *

I would only add now as a corollary that we may, I believe, drop theology, and yet, in certain exceptional cases, keep what is I now believe the essence of religion, conversion.

Setting theology then aside, as being but in this matter a series of explanatory hypotheses, what are the notes of the Mystical State whose sudden invasion we call Conversion ? Taking Conversion as a psychologist necessarily must, as merely a form of human behaviour, how would it be described ?

Its rhythm is uniform.

(1) There is a time of depression, a sense of loneliness, of failure, disaster, often amounting to

* A similar position has recently been put forward by Mr. Bertrand Russell, with a skill and philosophical knowledge far beyond my power, in a paper called "The Essence of Religion" which appeared in the October, 1912, number of the *Hibbert Journal*.

complete desolation and positive despair. Life is felt to be not worth living. Of course, if the patient has been brought up on the old legal theology this emotion takes the form of a conviction of sin. But this we set aside.

(2) This depression is succeeded by a time of extraordinary exaltation, of peace and joy unutterable. Intellectually this often, and indeed usually, takes the form of a sense of the sudden and almost intolerable significance in things. The relation of the whole of things is seen, or rather perhaps felt, directly, intuitively. There is a new and marvellously illuminating focus, and the old focus is only with difficulty reseized. Morally and emotionally this takes the form of a sensation of oneness. Individuality seems somehow submerged, partitions are broken down, there is a boundless sense of escape and emancipation from self.

It is in trying to utter this experience of oneness that mystics and converted people exhaust their vocabulary. "This," says Mr. James, "is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition hardly altered by clime or creed." In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian Mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note. Oneness, the Individual Soul is lost in the All. It is this state that is almost always explained by mystics in paradoxes—"dazzling obscurity," the "teeming desert," "the voice of silence," "Om tat-sat," "He that will save his life must lose it."

(3) Last, there is another characteristic note of the whole operation. It is involuntary, is no

work of the Conscious Will. You cannot convert yourself. If you are a theologian, it is the work of the spirit. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. "By Faith are ye saved, not of Works, lest any man should boast." If you are a psychologist, knowing that some of your best intellectual work is done unconsciously and often in your sleep, you begin to wonder if your *subconscious* self has something to say to it, and what is going on among your *synapses*.

Now in all this sea of mystical experience is there any solid scientific plank to which we can cling? I think there is. I think if we go back to quite primary and even savage conversions we can get hold of something solid and simple. The only light I, personally, can ever get on anything is by tracing it back to its first known beginnings. As you know, the notion of the New Birth is not of to-day or yesterday. Anthropology has taught us that the notion of the New Birth is practically almost as old as society itself. When among savages a boy is initiated he is often said to be born again, re-born, twice born. Not only is he said to be re-born, but his re-birth is acted in pantomime; he is killed, buried, burnt, torn to bits in pantomime, and then resuscitated, resurrected. Dr. Haddon not long ago gave us Heretics a vivid picture of these initiation ceremonies.

Now what does all this initiation amount to? In understanding this we grasp, I think, the secret—or at least one element of the secret—of Conversion.

Into what is the boy reborn—initiated ? Into his tribe, his social group. He dies as an individual, he lives again as a full grown member of his tribe. He is sown a severed fragment, he is raised and reaped a social collective unit, a new man, with a new outlook, new hopes, fears, joys, sorrows. Suddenly his centre of gravity, the focus of his outlook, is shifted. The former things are passed away. Behold I make all things new.

Now I am well aware that very similar sensations, both intellectual and emotional, are gone through by some people after taking a strong whisky and soda, and sometimes on coming to from an anaesthetic. An ounce or two of alcohol or ether will produce sometimes a pound of maudlin Christianity or pseudo-philosophy. The interesting thing is that the sense of revelation and of oneness can be engendered without either a stimulant or an anaesthetic.

The rhythm of Initiation has been well analysed by Mr. Marett in his *Birth of Humility*. It is precisely the same as that of Conversion ; it is, first depression, *asthenic emotion* as the psychologists in their unattractive lingo call it, then exaltation and ecstasy.

Now you will see what I am coming to. The savage New Birth is the abrupt transit from the merely individual existence of the child to the social life of the grown man. Conversion, I believe, is in its primary essence nothing else than this, the individual spirit is socialized. The self is thereby submerged. As Euripides said of the ecstatic follower of Bacchos *θιασεύεται ψυχάν*.

Dr. Verall has left us this illuminating translation, "His soul is congregationalized."

This submergence of the separate self is a thing that always happens in great emotion. "Religious rapture, moral enthusiasm, ontological wonder, cosmic emotion are all unifying states of mind," says Mr. James ; states of mind in which the "sand and grit of selfhood incline to disappear and tenderness to rule." The converted man swims out as it were into the open sea of other people's emotions.

Conversion then is but a sudden Unanimism ; Unanimism is at heart a slower, more gradual, more civilized Conversion. It is the release from the prison house of self. Genius, some one has said, is only the power of making more, and more fruitful mental connections than other people. These connections are often made unconsciously, in sleep, or when thinking of something else, made, I suppose, in relation to these mysterious *synapses*. Moral genius is but the innate or acquired power of feeling more sensitively for and with other people, of making wider, deeper, more vivid connections.

The submergence of, the release from, self is *the* important factor ; but the joining of a group seems an almost necessary condition ; only so is release obtained. Sometimes the joining of a comparatively small group, where reactions are close and vivid, is essential. Thus a Churchman vowed in Baptism to temperance may never be converted from drunkenness till he joins a small group of Total Abstainers. In any case the consciousness

of self is partially submerged, and thereby vitality is mysteriously reinforced.

That Conversion is the submergence of self in a wider emotion we can see, so to speak, in a practical way. Who are the subjects of sudden Conversion, the great historical converts? Why, who but the supremely vital egotists, the people in whom self is inordinately strong, who are over individualized?

Think of S. Paul, think of S. Augustine, think of S. Theresa. With them even in moments of profound self-abasement it is all I, I, I. "I am of all men most miserable"; "all sinners, of whom I am chief." The intense urgent personality of the man surges up again and again. The burning focus on the unhappy self, a focus that not even conversion can quite temper or diffuse.

And—an important question—*when* does conversion of the egotist take place? Normally, after some great crisis attended by disaster. Some shattering blow has been dealt to a man's personality, to his affection or ambition. All his life has been centred, perhaps, round some love or some ambition that fails him. His life, hitherto self-centred, or dominated by the god of the group two, is all in pieces. If he is weak he dwindles and dies or lives a half-starved life. If he is strong, all the pent-up forces, all the cut off reactions surge over from the self-centre into the circumference of other emotions, other lives. He turns to God, theology would say; he learns at last not to desire other men for himself

but to love them for themselves, says the Unanimist.

But with the egotist the first stage of Conversion, the blow shattering self is essential, and, of course, involuntary ; it must come from without. The happy, prosperous egotist is never converted, he knows satisfied desire, but never Unanimist Love. It is a rather terrible truth that the perfectly happy, contented man, whom life has fed to the full, knows, as a rule, neither creative art nor, in the Unanimist sense, religion. The two are very near, though, of course, largely distinct. Both mean a hard thing, the standing out away from self. One function of all art and all religion is to distract attention from that divinity which is ourselves. Mr. Bullough* has recently and beautifully shown us that art looks at things from a certain distance. Self, in so far as self consists in practical 'motor' reactions, is withdrawn. You cannot really see anything while you want to use it for your own ends. You cannot really feel towards a human being while you want to have that human being or to use him for yourself. You cannot, in a word, know Unanimist love till you have slain desire.

It is the great egotists then who—once the ego shattered—are twice born.

And who are those who are *never* converted, or perhaps one ought to say are born converted, born twice-born ?

*British Journal of Psychology, June, 1912. *Psychical Distance as a factor in Art and an Æsthetic Principle.*

Why, people of the Christ-like type, the altruists, those who are born loving the brethren. Probably we all know some one who is born *Unanimist*. The young are necessarily and rightly for the most part egotists. But sometimes you meet some one utterly and beautifully young who yet instinctively seeks to help every one, sees the good in every one, will not at any price hurt any one, cannot somehow live by another's loss, or live with another's pain. And then you tremble, for you have seen a thing divine, but too frail and lovely for this rough and tumble egotist world. Robust egotists sometimes feel such people are weak ; to me they are in a mystical way not only the glory, but the strength of the world to come.

Of course, they lose some robust human joys—they lose that keen human delight which the Germans so well call *Schadenfreude*, known to most of us ; the joy that comes from others' hurt, the enhancement, the complacent swelling out of your own personality when another is diminished, the shining in your eyes when you realise that another man has made a fool of himself. All this and much more the Unanimist at his Baptism of Fire must “steadfastly renounce.”

I heard a little while ago of a society founded in this University, or rather perhaps in this town. Its members pledge themselves to repeat to each other every complimentary thing they hear said of any member. I do not belong to that society, I was born too far North, and to us Northerners to pay a compliment, or even, face to face, to repeat one, is

matter for a surgical operation. But I feel it to be a good society, Unanimist through and through. It affirms agreement and fosters brotherly love. It is the reverse of *Schadenfreude*.

Now Unanimism—this is my last point—is, I believe, the new religion for which the world waits. Mankind is turning in its long egotistic sleep and waking to—Unanimism.

The new truth is, of course, as most truths are, a palimpsest, written this time over the ancient script of Christianity. Christianity began with the mandate, “Love one another,” but, alas, she soon crystallised into glittering Churches and exclusive hierarchic organizations. She forgot her first Unanimist Love. Worse still, she made a strange unnatural marriage with Hebraism, and from a Hebrew law-giver issued the disastrous dictum,

“The Lord thy God is a jealous God.”

This jealous God was, of course, the natural projection of the passion and jealousy of the human heart. Once projected he became the imminent horror of the old Conversion doctrine. He must have your whole life, your whole heart. It was an *impasse*, for your heart was full of love for lovely things and loveable people; you could not give up all, and yet in the words of the desperate hymn you prayed :

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be !
Help me to tear it from Thy throne
And worship only Thee !

Lovers still address hymns like this to the jealous god of the group two. They long to make a holocaust of every one and everything on the altar of passion, but nobody now dreams of calling that cruel madness religion. We know it for what it is, the egotism, the megalomania imposed by the fierce divinity of the group two, exclusive, anti-Unanimist.

Unanimism has come to stay. It already is, if unconsciously, our religion. I see it working in a thousand shapes. I see it in Peace Societies, in Socialism, even in Strikes, in each and every form of human Co-operation. Never was man so little theological, never so profoundly religious, so passionately social. Professor Durkheim—and before him John Stuart Mill—has shown us in his *Division du Travail Social* (pp. 35—75) an unexpected, Unanimistic truth in political economy. Only through that co-operation which is compelled by our modern specialization do we attain real freedom and full individual life, life based on sympathy and mutual interdependence. Our present profound dissatisfaction with our Criminal Law is due, he also shows us, to the same Unanimist stirrings. Repression, vengeance, disunion, are the keynotes of our old disastrous system. We kill the criminal or condemn him to solitary confinement, put him out of society, because he has shown

himself socially defective! A strange remedy. A savage schoolboy vengeance! Tit-for-tat! The new justice just dawning is based on what he calls, not Unanimism, but *Solidarité organique*. Its function is to unite what was severed, to find what a man is fit for, to help him to such specialisation, such training as may make him a real and indispensable living member of the human body politic.

I see the stirrings of this same Unanimism not only in practical philanthropy but also broadcast in modern literature.*

I open Mr. Wells' *Marriage*. Trafford says to Marjorie :—

It seems to me that the primitive socialism of Christianity and all the stuff of modern socialism is really aiming at one simple end, at the release of the human spirit from the individualistic struggle.

And again :—

When you and I talk, man and wife together, Marjorie, it is ourselves. When we talk religion it is mankind. You've got to be Every Man in religion, or leave it alone. . . Salvation's a mystical thing, a collective thing, or there isn't any.

It isn't the worship of the god of the group two, M. Romains would say. Still, we must remember that many men and women never do and never can get beyond the group two, and the worship of even this rudimentary god is a step, and a big one, out of the prison of self; the first great mystical

*The tragic conflict between articulate thought and reason and the instinctive emotions is well shown in M. Julien Benda's remarkable novel, "*L'Ordination*." Mind and the individual fall before Life. "Sa grace est plus forte." But to M. Benda *Unanimism* is apostasy. His hero dies as a thinker, "*buvant l'indistinction*."

lesson is experimentally learnt, the lesson that individuality is enhanced, not diminished, by partial submergence of self in another.

The study of Unanimism has helped me to understand things otherwise, to me, perplexing.

It has helped me to understand the ethics of Conformity. It has been a constant puzzle to me why able and honest people should go on conforming to religious practices when they have ceased to believe the doctrines involved in these practices—why they should go to Church or Chapel, read prayers, say grace, or what not, when they have ceased to believe in a god, or at all events no longer believe that he is accessible to their petitions. No explanation has ever been offered to me that seemed in any way worthy of the spiritual integrity of the conformists. In the light of Unanimism I think I understand. It is a question of relative values. The individualist is always more or less an intellectualist. He values first and foremost the intellectual truth he thinks he has attained. The Unanimist values more than truth the sense of unity and sympathy induced by a common ritual, he shrinks from seeming to get ahead intellectually of his fellows. On his system of values conformity is for him justified. For an individualist, with his quite other and intellectualistic system of values, it would be culpable. It takes both sorts of people to make a decent world.

Unanimism has further helped me to understand Conservatism, which is, of course, own brother to Conformity.

How any one could be interested in keeping things as they are, or in advancing at a minimum pace, has remained to me for years, in fact ever since I began to think on the subject at all, an insoluble puzzle. It seemed so dull. But in the light of Unanimism, I think I see at last. Conservatives are the real democrats. They refuse to advance till the last laggard is abreast with them. Intellectually this is extraordinarily tiresome and depressing, but emotionally it is fine and Unanimistic. Liberals, Reformers are intellectual aristocrats, hence the extraordinary intolerance and narrowness of nearly all "advanced" people. The intellectual aristocrat does not persecute; he leaves that to the excited herd. He shrugs his shoulders, goes straight ahead, and lets the devil take the hindmost.

Last, the study of Unanimism has helped me to understand a final mystery—the extraordinary reverence paid to the official. An official *qua* official, from the crowned head downwards, has always appeared to me, and especially when decked out in official finery, a *quasi* comic figure, something of the dressed-up doll. He rouses in me the instincts of the street-boy, and I have wondered much at the veneration he excites. I wonder no more. I see in him the real pathos and grandeur of the sacrificial victim. He is sacred through suffering. He commands, but only by obeying. He must not think for himself—save within the narrowest limits. He renounces, like the god-king of old, his own soul, even his daily life, that he may represent others. He must

always walk in step. He stands for the oneness, the average oneness of the Community. Through and through he is Unanimist. We owe him, we are bound to pay him, not only social distinction and the trappings and pickings of office, but a real reverence. I understand also now why nearly all business has to be transacted by Committees, but into this long and painful subject I cannot enter to-night.

The new religion of Unanimism is among us, but we are scarcely conscious of it, because it is so little intellectualist, it has at present no creed and no theology. Of theology in general I do not, as beforesaid, mean to speak. I owe theology too many private grudges and am too well aware that our opinions are apt to grow straight out of our personal pains and prejudices.

But on one point there will be no dispute, and it is of importance. Theology is intellectualist, it throws stress on thinking right, on forming correct religious conceptions, having right objects of faith. Now, thinking right and feeling right are not to be rashly sundered, but it is possible to stress one or the other, and Unanimism stresses feeling rather than thinking. In this it is the child of its age. It is obvious that nowadays reason, pure reason, has suffered a certain eclipse, intellectualism is distrusted, perhaps unduly. The cause is fairly obvious. A by-gone generation believed in Reason as a motive-power, and as a motive power Reason was, of course, a dismal failure. It is abundantly possible to see the right

clearly, to utter beautiful things about unity and tenderness and infinite love, and yet in your private life, in your actual relations with those about you to be as hard as nails, pitiless, bitter, suspicious, egotistic. Unanimism says, "stop writing about humanity—be a man, be humane."

Yet, though Unanimism is in a sense anti-intellectualist, it is also, and this is a curious point, in some way the child of Science. A scientific man can scarcely be a complete egotist; his life-work compels him to study not the relation of things to him only, but their immutable relations among themselves. Science, concerned with the universal, releases from the personal and individual and is therefore *the* great Unanimist discipline. Moreover, science, which began through mathematics with the quantitative and immutable relations of inorganic things, passed to the study of Life, which is change, to Biology, to Psychology, the relation of that which is within to that which is without, and ultimately to Sociology. Both these young sciences teach us the laws of our dependence one on the other. Psychology and Sociology formulate and explain† what Christianity preached and Unanimism tries to practise—"No man liveth unto himself."

† With of course at present only partial success. When, if ever, Psychology and Sociology have completely explored the field of human relation these territories will be like Mathematics withdrawn from the sphere of religion, and handed over to science. The weakness of Unanimism may seem to be its excessive stress on *human* relations, but we must remember that these relations belong as yet to the partially unknown, the proper sphere of religion.

Never, perhaps, do we so touch the secret of Unanimism as in that intellectual specialism with its concomitant co-operation made necessary by the wide scope of modern science. You are working at some new problem, getting, you hope, at some new theory. You instinctively feel you are on the right track, but you do not know enough, your specialism is too narrow. The post comes in ; somebody from France, from Germany, from America sends you a pamphlet. It is not about your own work. It is about his specialism, and he is grinding his own axe. But suddenly your own axe has got a new edge. He has got hold in his specialism of something you could never know. His key fits your lock, and the delightful door flies open. You do not know him, perhaps you never will, perhaps it is better you should not—the body might divide you for ever—but you write to him out of a full heart, your whole being goes out in a great Unanimism.

To conclude. Looking back over the ages we seem to see three landmarks of advancing civilisation. The Age of Force, the Age of Reason, the Age of Unanimist Love.

The need of resisting outside force made man unite in groups and humanised him. His comparative security gave time and opportunity for the individual to develop, safe within the group and reason was able to emerge. Fully developed, this individual life is home sick for the other lives through which it emerged and from which it is never wholly separate. Man comes to feel that

only through the over-tones of these other lives can his own sharp individual pitch be softened into musical timbre. Reason with all her gathered sheaves comes home to the service of Unanimist Love.

It is of the coming of this New Unanimist Messiah that M. Vildrac sings in *The Conqueror* :—

“ And the time came in the land,
The time of the Great Conquest,
When the people with this desire
Left the threshold of their door
To go forth—towards one another.”

Unanimism spells conversion : conversion not to God, but to your fellow-man.

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2. That the object of the Society be to promote discussion on problems of Religion, Philosophy, and Art.

4. Membership of the Society shall imply the rejection of all appeal to Authority in the discussion of religious questions; Associates shall consist of those who while in sympathy with the general principle of open discussion are not entirely free to become Members.

5. That Members and Associates be elected from Members of the University of Cambridge and of Girton and Newnham Colleges.

6. That the subscription for Members be 7s. per year, payable in the Michaelmas term; for Associates 4s. per year, payable in the Michaelmas term. That those elected Members in the Lent term pay during that term 5s. for the remainder of the academic year; those elected in the Easter term 2s. during that term. That Associates elected under similar conditions pay 3s. and 1s. respectively. That anyone failing to pay his subscription in the term indicated shall not receive the Society's notices until the subscription be paid, and failing to pay at the division of the term subsequent to that indicated shall cease to be a Member or Associate of the Society, and shall not be re-eligible until all arrears owing to the Society shall have been paid.

8. That Business Meetings be confined to Members only; and that at all other meetings Members, Associates, and Honorary Members may introduce Visitors.

